

Annual Report
of the
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
July 1, 1962, to June 30, 1963

III. Navy and Marine Corps Operations

Cuba

The Cuban crisis, which occurred in October–November 1962, was both a major challenge to a variety of fleet units and a vivid demonstration of the Navy's ability to meet such challenges successfully.

A major activity carried on in support of this operation was the location, inspection, and diversion of Cuba-bound merchant shipping carrying certain excluded cargo. In accomplishing this task, naval aircraft flew approximately 6,000,000 miles and fleet units steamed approximately 780,000 miles, with each of the eight aircraft carriers utilized in the operation steaming more than 10,000 miles.

During the crisis, Navy photographic units were particularly active, monitoring the military activities of Cuban and Soviet forces. A new Navy-developed aerial camera was used by both the Navy and the Air Force in the highly effective photo-reconnaissance over the island; and the Naval Photographic Interpretation Center provided processing and photo-interpretation services that were vitally important to the hour-by-hour evaluation of the military buildup.

The quarantine operation provided the most demanding test of the Navy's Antisubmarine Warfare (ASW) capabilities since World War II. It was also the first large-scale test of our ASW capability against modern submarines of the U.S.S.R.

In evident anticipation of possible United States reaction to the emplacement of offensive missiles in Cuba, the U.S.S.R. deployed a number of modern, conventionally powered submarines in the general area. During subsequent operations six of these submarines were photographed and identified by U.S. naval forces. So far as can be determined, no Russian submarines committed to the Cuban operation escaped detection and tracking. By tracking these submarines—and by being capable of destroying them if necessary—the Navy denied their effective use to the U.S.S.R.

The crisis also provided a particularly striking demonstration of the responsiveness of Marine forces. Guantanamo was rapidly reinforced by combat-ready units deploying simultaneously from three different locations. Five thousand Marines, completely equipped and ready to fight, were moved into position by sea and by air in 48 hours to augment the Guantanamo garrison. The Caribbean contingency

force which is constantly deployed in that area for such purposes landed a battalion by sea. A second battalion was airlifted from Cherry Point, N.C., employing Navy and Marine transport aircraft. A third battalion was airlifted from Camp Pendleton, Calif., by Military Air Transport Service (MATS) aircraft. Appropriate supporting arms accompanied these combat units. The rapid and immediate introduction of these combat-ready forces into Guantanamo assured the defense of that key base during the following days and weeks of the crisis.

In similar fashion, a Marine air-ground amphibious striking force was quickly assembled for offensive operations. Elements which had been deployed to the Puerto Rico area for a training exercise joined other combat units of the Marine division/wing team outloading from the Cherry Point-Camp Lejeune complex on the east coast. Additionally, a Marine expeditionary brigade of more than 10,000 troops embarked from west coast ports in less than 96 hours and sailed to join the east coast division/wing team in the Caribbean area. This Marine air-ground striking force was fully prepared to execute its assigned assault missions at any time throughout the crisis period. Its presence in the Caribbean area provided ample testimony of United States intent to take any action required.

Finally, it should be stressed that the Cuban quarantine was undertaken as a legal operation within the spirit of international law. The Navy's role included both participation in the drafting of the quarantine proclamation and in its legal implementation.

Vietnam

The Marine task unit which was deployed to Vietnam in April 1962 remained in that country during this period. A medium helicopter squadron formed the nucleus of the task unit; its support was drawn mainly from a detachment furnished by a Marine air base squadron. Four squadrons of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing have rotated through this assignment thus far. Initial operations were conducted in the Mekong Delta area during the period April-September 1962, with the task unit based at Soc Trang. Since September 1962 the task unit has supported operations from Danang near the 17th parallel dividing North and South Vietnam. This relocation was made to exploit the superior lift capability of the Marine helicopters in mountainous terrain.

Favorable reaction to the work of two Seabee technical assistance teams in South Vietnam has prompted the Agency for International Development of the Department of State to request increased use of such units in provincial rehabilitation operations in that country. This work would be concerned with concentrated hamlet development,